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THE FIFTH CHILD

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BY KLAUS MANN

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LAMBERT ARMOUR SHEARS

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THE FIFTH CHILD

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CHAPTER I

SINCE the death of her husband, Frau Christiane lived in the country the year round with her four children, in the vicinity of a small Bavarian market-town, not far from the mountains. They were well established in a comfortable villa, on the red roof of which a rooster turned in the wind. The garden about the villa was large. In front of the house it was well tended, with paths and circular beds; but toward the rear it became more and more wild, extending to the great forest from which it was separated only by a dilapidated wire fence.

An asylum for blind children had been

erected in the middle of the forest, and one could see boys and girls with white, sightless eyes, playing or walking almost all day in the care of a few female attendants. But often they groped about skillfully, alone, accompanied only by dogs.

If one left the garden by the front, one came out on the gray highway, which, descending by gentle turns, led down to the town.—But to get to the place, it is also possible to go straight over the meadows, between whose hills a path winds.

The four children are named Renate, Heiner, Fridolin and Lieschen. Renate is nine, Heiner eight, Fridolin seven and Lieschen five. Mama is thirty-one. For her birthday they had managed to hunt up thirty-one white candles.

When mama came to their bed in the evening to say good-night, she was sometimes so wonderful they were obliged to

love her with an extravagance of which they would surely have been ashamed in the daytime. When she sat in the girls' bedroom, Heiner at once called to her so ecstatically that she had to free herself gently from Renate and Lieschen. Heiner then kissed her hands, unable to control his affection. He showered her with pet names like a courting cavalier. "You are so beautiful," he said again and again, "you are simply a thousand times beautiful. . . ." But speech was not enough; he caressed her with new words of tenderness, suggested to him by his adoration of her: "You are so lolly, so nolly . . ." Finally mama laughingly freed herself.

Often during the day mama was by no means so agreeable. When she was tired her eyes became dimmer, and often she lay on the veranda with a headache. She sent the children away with a tired voice when

they came to assail her with confusing requests. "Do go into the garden," she said dully. "Your pleasure is really there, there you can have your romp——"

To be sure, two hateful obstacles interfered somewhat with the romping. In the first place there is teacher Burkhardt, a clever young brunet, who appears daily for two hours. He comes in a good humor and with a leather brief-case under his arm to instruct Heiner and Renate. Teacher Burkhardt himself is not really hateful, but what he has to teach them is altogether too tedious. Equally repulsive are arithmetic and religion. Furthermore, teacher Burkhardt is in the habit of threatening the worst punishment if lessons are not prepared accurately. "I'll summon you to public school," he promises sternly. "To-morrow at eight o'clock you will be sitting in my class, and our private lessons

will be at an end. Everybody will ridicule you if you haven't learned your lesson by to-morrow." The eyes of Renate and Heiner meet shyly and grow dark with apprehension. They are firmly convinced that everybody would laugh. Anyway, the street urchins always laugh so much when the four children from the villa go out walking, with faces stern in self-defense, dressed in gay smocks and protected by the nurse, with her knitting.

During the time that teacher Burkhardt stays with the big people, the high spirits of the little folks are dampened and almost quenched. Being too imaginative to continue alone the big and daring games of before, they sit together, small and forsaken, over stupid dice games, or listlessly join Afra, the warm-hearted cook, who is resolutely mixing the cake-dough.

The nurse, Konstantine Bachmann, is

naturally an enemy—much more dangerous and worse than teacher Burkhardt. For, while the power of the pedagogue extends over only two hours in the daytime, Fräulein Konstantine's disturbing appearance can be expected any time. She turns up suddenly among the bushes, with the stocking she is knitting between her fingers, and with an expression of profound indifference on her white, rather puffy face. Her glance, bored and slightly piqued, is directed at her work, which progresses with such vexing nimbleness. Is she not, indeed, the wicked enemy, the adversary, the evil principle—as she stands there in faded, colorless knitted jacket, with blue dress and with her pale blonde hair waved. “What mischief are you up to again?” she asks coldly and contemptuously. Look, now she is raising her foot quickly—look, she is already knocking lightly against

something which was of the gravest importance, as if she were reluctantly testing its endurance. It was a building in the sand—a whole city—a Caliph's palace.

When Fräulein Konstantine was in a good humor she could be jolly and entertaining. Then the children laughed gratefully at every single joke. In such rare hours she would tell stories—especially of her native city, Düsseldorf. She pronounced the name almost voluptuously, lingeringly, as if it were the finest word in the language, with a too soft, sensuous initial D. She even related, at great length, little family anecdotes, droll stories of her mother and her married sister.

“Just think,” she chatted then, very gayly, “I’d come home late in the evening, had probably drunk a little more than my thirst demanded, and my sister Liesbeth, the rogue, had hidden in my bed to sur-

prise me. But one of her hands was lying on my bedroom table; it had probably gotten there in her sleep. And as I grope in the dark for the lamp on my table, I detect the fingers of my sister. And do you know what I thought? I thought some one had set out sausages for me to gobble when I came home tired in the evening. I was about to get a little knife and cut them off. Ha, ha—Liesbeth would have yelled lustily. Yes, yes," she laughed, good-natured and pleased, "it was like that in my Düsseldorf—"

But woe to the children, if they at an inopportune time later teased her with the sausage hands of her sister. That offended her so much that she did not speak again for half a day. "It is an insult to my whole family," was all she said. But it was worst of all when she had received an ugly letter from her fiancé. Then it was

not possible to get along with her at all. She scolded little Lieschen on slight provocation until she wept bitterly, and when she had gone so far, she even slapped her in her excitement and hissed savagely: "This is to let you know why you are howling."

It was not right of mama to acknowledge that Fräulein Konstantine was right in such cases. When the children came to complain she only smiled and said that Fraülein Konstantine would surely know why she did that. Nevertheless she consoled Lieschen.

At such times one could almost hate mama, although one would not admit it for anything in the world. "She is unjust," whispered the children indignantly.— But beautiful mama sat with vacant eyes, her hands in her lap; she was troubled be-

cause she noticed that the refractory children were completely alienated from her at such times.

Mama was most charming in summer. She went with the children to bathe. One turned off to the left from the meadow path after going for a while in the direction of the town. Then one reached the Klammer Pond, which lay black and marshy between solemn fir trees. Even the fir trees in the woods were not so dark and awe-inspiring as those which gravely shaded the water here.—But the pond was made lovelier by the water-lilies, round as saucers, floating on its darkened surface.

The children loved most of all the smell in the wooden dressing-booths, which was strangely ancient and swampy, and agreeably mingled with the vapors from drying bathing cloaks and tights. The children sniffed it in, although it seemed to them

rather unappetizing, even indecent and repellent.

Mama sat in her black bathing-tights on the spring-board, while all the gentlemen looked over curiously from the men's pool. But she kept her eyes lowered. Her splendid legs gleamed white in the sun. It was enchanting to see how she raised her arms, and with a dazed, expectant, strangely dead, yet curious smile about her half-opened mouth, slowly descended, one at a time, the slippery wooden steps from the booth. Now the water, black and icy-cold, was playing about her feet, as she stooped, happy and shivering, to yield her whole body to its caresses.

The four children sat in a row on the beam which separated the pool for non-swimmers from the dangerously deep water. All four of them let their thin legs dangle, and splashed each other and

shouted so that their voices rang over the pond.

Renate was the only one of them who was confident of swimming correctly. With serious eyes she carefully got into the water; she firmly believed that she would sink if she forgot even one of the movements that she had been taught. Relentlessly she counted, her lips blue with cold—one, two—one, two—and moved bravely.—But Heiner objected timidly when they expected the same thing of him. He resisted and feared for his life.

The ugly figure of the bathing-woman stood on the shore, and joked with them. Red bathing-trunks were drying on the line, comically puffed out by the wind. In the men's section men were standing in front of their booths, wrapped in gay-colored bathing-cloaks, chatting and smoking cigars. Many snorted in the water,

louder than was necessary. On their chests grew black hair.

But mama swam far out between water-lilies and reeds. She nodded and laughed,—one hand raised from the water, paddling on with the other, blinking at the sun.

* * * *

In summer one went with mama, looking for berries. In the middle of the clearing in the woods mama sat on the stump of a tree among many thorns. She was dull and stupefied by the heat. The four children hurried about, bending over excitedly to pick and search, for it was a matter of honor to be the first to bring a full bowl to mama. Mama poured the contents into the little basket which stood beside her, but it was big, and many bowls of berries were needed to fill it half full.

Here, too, Renate was more capable and

useful than all the rest. She climbed about nimbly, her legs much scratched, and did not mind any amount of stooping. Her dark hair hung disordered about her somber, boyish face, and the slender and taciturn girl looked like a stern, resolute beggar-boy as she did her work.

Heiner, on the other hand, preferred to play with blades of grass. He often sat humming and murmuring somewhere in the sun, pensive and happy. If he was warned and scolded for his laziness, he was at once ready to repent charmingly.

Fridolin was the only one of the children who was not really handsome. His face was gnomelike, a small, wry countenance, drolly framed by hair as smooth as silk. He had a high chest and his mouth was too wide. But he was perhaps just the one who supplied the motive power for all that was undertaken. As a personality, he was

certainly the equal of Heiner, even if he served him devotedly.—He was also very industrious in looking for berries; indeed, he displayed an alarming and terrible zeal, quite different from Renate's matter-of-fact and melancholy capability.

Lieschen, with her wandering gaze, usually stayed near mama. She was still too dainty and delicate to take serious part in the duties and occupations of the big people.

On the way home one had to be careful not to go near that part of the woods where the blind-asylum was. Mama was so frightened that she trembled when she suddenly saw one of the white-eyed children, dull and sightless, and yet contented, out walking with its attendant.

On such summer evenings mama seemed to the children more beautiful than all the fairies and empresses. After supper she

walked wearily in the garden which was transformed to a greenish-gold in the sunset. She looked across at the mountains to see whether they seemed near or distant, and spoke of the kind of weather the next day would bring. In the oval of her face shimmered mother-of-pearl eyes, whose glance glided tenderly and vacantly over things. Nor did her eyes remain long on the children. She stroked them in a loving, but strange, almost terrified manner.

When the föhn-storms, that the children loved passionately, came, mama was usually sick. She lay with a headache and cool compresses. It seemed to her as if the mountains were coming now to overwhelm her, since they suddenly lay before her window so near and green.

Meanwhile, the children were running exultantly about in the garden, and were throwing themselves against the warm hur-

ricane, rejoicing with arms raised aloft.—They ran down the meadows with fluttering locks and an intoxicated gleam in their eyes, a band of drunken revelers.

But mama, on the veranda, was almost afraid of her strange children.

* * * *

However, the family was most singular in winter, when the fir trees stood black and icy-cold in front of white meadows, and the Klammer Pond was frozen over. Then one had to stay at home almost all day, and in the evening one sat with books about the fireplace. Mama had on a velvet dressing-gown and shivered a great deal. Fräulein Konstantine needed woolen shawls to preserve her delicate health. Luxi, the dog, was very old and shaky, an iron-gray invalid who had once been papa's favorite. The cold season depressed him very much, and he squatted, growling, in

his corner.—Only the fat cook, Afra, remained cheerful and strong. The children went coasting with her. She took along an awkward gigantic sled on which there was room for eight. Their toboggan-slide was behind the Zwicker peasant's place. The slide was too steep, and made dangerous by mole hills; one seldom arrived at the bottom without overturning several times. Thrilled by the dangers, Afra exulted in masculine tones, while every one rolled pell-mell in the snow. Mama, who had followed them uneasily, appeared above and complained as if all were now over. The whole family of the Zwicker peasant stood before their home and made rough jokes.

In the winter the children eagerly read sea stories or the Song of the Nibelungs, abridged for children. And so they could amuse themselves agreeably at table with

beautiful quotations from their reading, that seemed puzzling and astonishing to the grown-ups. "I know," said Heiner doubtfully, to his older sister, "you lack butter on your bread, mother Backrogge, but I too, dear God, I too." That occurred in "Captain Spieker and his Cabin-boy." But Fridolin declaimed emphatically: "Then Hagen of Tronje shed the first tears of his life. He who was master of laughter wept over Volker of Alcey."

Then they would think of writing poetry themselves. Heiner especially would sit many hours before his blank books and become vexed when any one disturbed him. Afterward he read aloud gruesome and wicked ballads, such as the following:

*"A proud youngster named Sindy
On Monday lost his property,
So he cried and wailed very much,
Indeed more than fearful was such.*

*Then down he lies quite faint and
dizzy*

*On the soft, and a leaf of an oak tree
Shades him,*

*Which he had planted there with vim,
All of a sudden with a dash
The whole roof tumbles with bang and
crash.*

*The beautiful youngster was forlorn.
He cried: Oh, why was I ever born,
If here I must pass away,
As if trampled by God's feet, hey?—
And so he died full of gloom,
Very much crushed in his narrow
room.”*

Fridolin admired these poems greatly, and Renate, too, found in them nothing to criticize.—But all this seemed strange and peculiar to the mother, who understood it almost as little as she had understood her dead husband. The children were like him in so many things; each of them had, as it were, inherited a different part of his dis-

position. But an inexhaustible, free, roving imagination and a certain severity and gravity they all had in common ; both these traits they had received from him. It was surprising to find, in addition, elements from the gentler nature of the mother. The mixture of blood was a strange thing.

Their father had died even before Lieschen's birth. His death-mask was hanging before a black, velvet cloth over the bed in Christiane's room. With its large nose, relentlessly screwed up mouth and stern, dreamy gaze, the mask dominated the room of the widow. The husband had been a famous philosopher, but she did not know a single one of his books : he had always forbidden her absolutely to read them. Besides, they were too difficult for her intellect. His works stood in dark rows in his somber study, the furnishings of which she had left unchanged in

every detail since his death. All because of her respect for him. All Europe spoke of his disquieting and radical writings.

Her husband had been a Catholic priest when she became acquainted with him. The scandal occasioned by his withdrawal from the church was appalling. His fearful and accursed refractoriness alarmed even the pope whom he threatened in a monstrous pamphlet.—Nevertheless, for some unfathomable reason, he went about until his death in the black, high-cut garb, and the white rosary did not leave his writing-table. One found in his will the strict injunction to place the rosary in the coffin with him.—Since his catastrophic hostility to the church, the philosopher served only Christiane, of whose origin nobody had the least knowledge.

Who was mama?—The children did not worry about that. They did not even

know whether there was a grandfather and grandmother. There was only an uncle, who had once suddenly come for a visit. He was mama's younger brother and an actor in the large cities. Who would have dared speak ill of mama? A wonderfully beautiful and mysterious middle-class lady, she lived in the deepest seclusion in the country, occupied solely with the education of her four children, and with the revered memory of her husband. The infrequent visitors, who were announced, were sent away by Fräulein Konstantine, regardless of how far they had come, and they did not get a glimpse of mama.

In the winter mama was still more inactive than usual. She went about much in the house, humming and smiling. She sat for hours in her room and read in Holy Scripture. Often she was busy with large pieces of crochet work. She sat by the

window, bending over dark, futile coverlets, her hands moving silently.

She got up and went over to the nursery. There the four were crouching together in the semi-darkness, and Fridolin was telling in a subdued voice about the ghost-princess, Mee-Mee, whom one could hear humming and tittering at night. But suddenly they all spoke of how far one could really count; however, they didn't get beyond a trillion. In their excitement they interrupted one another. "But we must surely go further!" cried Renate indignantly. "What is the highest? I ask you: what is the highest?"—And Heiner invented a new number, the highest of all, incomprehensibly high. "Infinite-Pox," he said reverently, "that comes after a trillion—and there is always that. Infinite-Pox: there is always that——"

Mama stood in the door-frame with ter-

rified eyes. What witches' Sabbath had she gotten into? Surely, similar matters were discussed in her husband's mysterious, forbidden books.

The children passed the time in winter with such speculations. But they did not play their real, great, wonderful games until it was spring again.

CHAPTER II

WHAT could be more complicated, more varied, more charming and more confused than the games that they invented and in which they lived all day long? In deadly earnest they pursued these games, that were more familiar and more akin to this reality of theirs than to the other often irksome reality of Fräulein and teacher Burkhardt. It was indeed a new universe which arose about them, when they sat together, serious-eyed, in the sand pile, or farther back by the pool, or at the very end of the garden. Here the land became strange to them, and the proximity of the white-eyed children made it almost uncanny.

Heiner was the most inventive of the children. He was dressed in a fiery red, gayly knitted smock, and his golden locks framed his beautiful face. He squatted gesticulating in the grass, always holding in his hands two little sticks of exactly the same length, the bark of which he was peeling off. Now it is a question of preventing catastrophes. A realm must be protected. Terrible invasions threaten. Fridolin proves his worth as adjutant. His devotion resembles malice, and one suspects demonic motives for his slavish helpfulness. His imagination is filled with horrible creatures, and he hits upon infernal, unheard-of and monstrous things. While Heiner is satisfied with princes, archbishops and monarchs, Fridolin likes to work with hangmen, madmen and gentle witches. Claws reach out of all the trees, everywhere it is dangerous and under-

mined. *Dwarfs are on the way*— But when their games have reached their giddiest heights, Heiner asserts briefly, with delightfully shameless boasting, that he is God. But Fridolin gives one to understand that he is the demi-god. And who would venture now to decide which is the more important, which the more powerful of the two?

There are many realms to which one must attend and for which one must bear sole responsibility. They themselves, the four children, are, to be sure, not really kings in one of these states; they stand above parties, as it were, as a supreme councilor, or a highest court of appeal. Their patronage is given to the land of the Uesen, which they all love most. It is the state to which belong particularly the animals and every creature which appears a little helpless, or has big, touching eyes.

There are Herr Gunderling's heavy cows, which look about, so troubled; the old dog Luxi; many babies, that, dirty and startled, sit forlorn in the yards of the peasant houses; and finally the poor, much too fat elephant from the picture book. Luxi is king in Uese-land, and he wears his crown with dignity. Yet one must help him a little to govern, for clumsiness of speech and gentle stupidity are characteristic of the people.

"Klie-Klie" is the monarchy of malicious street-urchins. Doesn't "Klie-Klie" sound like wicked laughter, like shrill whistling, stone-throwing, insolent, primitive cunning? "Uese" and "Klie-Klie" are enemies, and always were from the beginning. How could it be otherwise? Even in dim, prehistoric times there was bloody fighting between them.

But recently a second enemy has be-

come more and more annoying, more and more suspicious, and in need of discipline every day. It is called “Wuffig,” the disagreeable and mighty republic of which Fräulein Konstantine is president. Shop-girls are ministers, piano-teachers torment the people—a regular ladies-land, passionless but cruel. Hasn’t mama herself in ugly hours had something to do with it? “Wuffig,” the land of the grown-ups, is worse than “Klie-Klie,” although it does not make much fuss about it.

What good can come from the alliance which “Wuffig” and “Klie-Klie” have formed? “Uese-land” is threatened,—that much is certain,—and the children are sitting excitedly together. It is so long since “Uese-land” was overcome the last time. It might almost have been decisive. Kuli, the small, fat king of the elephants, was then the victim: Herbert, the arch

street-urchin, stabbed him to death at the splendid royal feast. A great turmoil, a revolution was the consequence.—Such things had to be avoided this time.

Renate is even slimmer than a boy, as she stands leaning on the swing with wild, disheveled, black page's locks and in tattered smock. Her whole being is tense and all eagerness to act. "You hesitate!" she cries energetically. "We must interfere! We will thrash Klie-Klie!!"—Heiner, squatting in the sand, plays apprehensively with blades of grass, makes objections, and smiles disapprovingly at so much energy. Fridolin, odd and aloof, mentions certain executioners and witches that are at his disposal. Lieschen, indeed, is altogether passive: she listens prettily and with wide-open eyes, a dainty Highness from "Uese-land."

Renate draws her eyebrows together

sternly, and makes her switch hiss belligerently. "You must believe it this time!" her Amazonian cruelty demands. But Heiner strokes his gleaming locks tenderly and thoughtfully, not daring to meet his sister's formidable glance. He smiles anxiously at the sand in front of him. "Klie-Klie is very powerful——"

Everything can be transformed at a stroke. Gone are the realms that warred against one another, gone is peril and sinister conspiracy. The house becomes a luxurious steamer, the garden a promenade deck. Everything is very grown-up, very elegant. One is traveling to Asia, outside the meadows are waves, a greenish billowy sea. All bear grown-up names, are rich and do not need to deny themselves anything that they wish. Fridolin is called Mr. Dandelion and is a millionaire, Heiner is addressed as Herr Steinrück and natu-

rally possesses billions. Conversation is carried on in small groups, and there is clever gossip. Baroness Baudessin, who was formerly called Renate, has assumed a sporty, Americanized manner, while Fräulein Lieschen von Hirselmann, her small companion, must stay in the background, at which she secretly scolds a little.

“Oh,” Herr Steinrück complains, speaking through his nose, in a bored manner, “so much is offered on this ship—three plays *and* three concerts every evening—what is one to do with so much luxury, eh?”—But the dashing Baroness generally prefers to gallop across the deck in the evening on her black horse.

Even the dolls, at other times useless and stiff are drawn into the worldly activity. Little Madam, especially, plays a great rôle; she is most dainty in the pink dress and with blonde wig. Herr Steinrück’s son,

Bobbelchen, is unfortunately very frivolous, therefore also bald. His father says dejectedly that he often attends all three plays and all the concerts in one evening. This entertainment is so immoderate that Baroness Baudessin recommends a beating.

Fräulein Konstantine is the “lady of the ship.” She is not loved very much, but she cannot harm any one, can she? People make light of her “Wuffig” existence by skillful conversation.

Look, now the steamer is making a stop. That is the island, Karo, in the Pacific Ocean. Couldn’t one promenade a little on land? And wouldn’t it be merely conforming to the rules of courtesy to invite the lady of the ship to do this, too?

From a different viewpoint, this means that Fräulein Konstantine, in a bad humor, is taking the children for a walk.

They walk together down the rough vil-

large street, the houses of which are painted in an old-fashioned way. From the façades of the houses the saints, in the gaudy drapery of their fantastic garments, threaten and perform miracles with uplifted arms. Hordes of street-boys are on the road. But the four children walk along preoccupied with their game, chatting excitedly together, just as if enchanted.

Fräulein Konstantine, while she is knitting, converses with the ladies from the notion shop. The children stand together on one side in their fantastic jackets, a strange band.

Dark clouds come up behind the mountains, the children press closely together, as if they feared a thunder-storm, which might come up suddenly. Don't they also tremble at the blessing of the saints above them, which is bestowed with eloquently

outstretched arms? Its powerful spell almost resembles a curse.—Meanwhile, the street-urchins confer as to how they can properly torment them.

Lieschen looks about her foolishly and bewildered, pretty as a little stupid angel. Heiner smiles charmingly and distantly; smiling gallantly, he bows to Renate. “A charming city, this Karo—don’t you think so, dear Baroness?” But Renate only looks about defiantly from under her disheveled hair.

Meanwhile, Fridolin remarks gently, ambiguously, as if he would not exactly like to contradict Heiner, and with a timid, crooked glance to one side: “Of course, only man-eaters and dwarfs seem to live here——”

Then they all fall silent.

CHAPTER III

WHILE the children were still on their walk, a visiting-card was brought to Frau Christiane in the living-room, and Afra announced that a young man was waiting outside. Mama lowered her eyes haughtily as if the gentlemen in the pool had looked at her improperly. "You surely know that I receive nobody," she said sternly and laid the card aside. She sat with relentlessly lowered head and lips slightly pinched, as if she were an abbess and one had offended her by an immodest request.—She had not even read the name which was on the card, she had only casually noticed that the young gentleman bore the given name, "Till."

Awkward Afra thought, in her confusion, that the gentleman had an insistent manner, and one would not be able to send him away so easily. Her mistress was strangely irritated and weary; in disgust, she turned her face to the window: "Just bring him in," she added.

The young man was not so very tall, but very slender. His clothes were a little too chic and a little shabby and included blue silk shirt and worn low shoes. His eyebrows were very striking, surprisingly thick and high-arched; he seemed to be constantly raising them, thus making his eyes look somewhat like those of a child, wide-open and startled. But his staring eyes were of a wonderfully vivid, even bewildering blue. Christiane, who was still sitting in an austere and pious manner by the window, asked softly: "What do you

wish, please?"—and offered him a seat with a gesture which was insulting.

The young man spoke very politely and quickly, but without taking his childlike, disquieting eyes from Christiane. "For a long time I have been a passionate admirer of your late husband," he said readily and eagerly. "I couldn't say what would have become of me intellectually and humanly without his work. I felt, therefore, as you will understand, the ardent and urgent desire to become acquainted with the house in which he spent the last years of his life, his library, perhaps also pictures of him—and above all, you, my dear lady," he said with a boyishly gallant smile and a slight, knightly bow, "since you were so closely united with him."

He spoke politely and with well-chosen words, but too quickly and with a singularly childlike frankness which gave his

words a somewhat comical and touching effect.

"Do you also write philosophical works?" asked Christiane, still with the reserved air of a lady. But now her eyes glided at times over his restless face which grimaced as he spoke, and about her mouth hovered that expectant, dead and yet curious smile.—At her question the young man chuckled, flattered. "Yes, yes, just as you like," he said quickly. "I write everything possible—indeed, I do everything possible——"

A few minutes later they went together through the house, so that he could examine everything that reminded him of the dead master. They stood side by side in the semi-darkness of his somber study. "Yes, here everything is still in the same place, exactly, as he left it," said Christiane in a subdued manner. "His many

books, his big paper-knife, the big ink-well——”

There were only two pictures that were hung here: above the writing-table the brownish photograph of an early Gothic Christ, racked with pain, giving his blessing from the cross, and farther to one side, a large photograph of Christiane as a bride, her half-veiled face turned back, about her mouth the expectant and blissfully dazed smile. “Yes, he loved you very much,” said Till reverently, his eyes upon the photograph. The widow replied sadly and proudly: “In the end I had, indeed, become a kind of symbol to him.” —She said the word “symbol” with uncertainty and difficulty, as if she did not know what it meant.—Till suddenly looked her full in the face. He found her standing so troubled between the books and before the photographs. Now he saw, too, for the

first time how rarely beautiful she was.—He then remarked irrelevantly: “I, too, have this Christ—yes, I knew that your husband loved it so much——”

Then they went to the second floor where the death-mask hung above the wide mahogany bed in front of the black velvet cloth. Till, with eyes wide-open like those of a child, stared at the white face without saying a word, as if he could never again forget a single detail of this face as long as he lived.

“To the end he looked like a priest,” Christiane said, shyly breaking the silence. Till replied slowly in a voice which seemed to show fear: “But in the end he no longer believed anything at all. His sole conviction was that all values of our civilization are dead and done with, that the gigantic catastrophe is imminent, the decisive house-cleaning, the Bolshevik flood——” “In his

last years he was a nihilist," said Christiane in a dull and troubled voice. And Till, without heeding her, continued his train of thought: "I then became a Bolshevik by reading his books——" "Ah, you are a Bolshevik?" Christiane asked him shyly. The strange young man laughed shortly. "Yes, among other things."

They stood together before the death-mask which gazed beyond them in deepest silence, and their conversation went on, confused and disjointed. "But his orthodox Catholic books have remained most beautiful of all," he said, again after a pause; and smiling in a different way, "those I love immensely." Becoming matter-of-fact and interested, Till inquired suddenly: "Was he still a priest when he became acquainted with you?" And she answered remorsefully with lowered eyes:

"I fear that he left the holy Church just on my account. I have never been able to comprehend that. I am a devout Christian." She heard the young man at her side say in a cold, lonely voice: "I no longer believe in God." She did not dare to look into his face, but she knew what a death-like sadness had now appeared in his eyes. At this moment she felt for the first time affection for him.

Christiane invited him to stay to tea. Soon they were sitting opposite one another at the round little table on the veranda. Christiane looked at him and said to herself that he was not really handsome, indeed hardly even nice-looking. His mouth was too full, and his nose not nobly formed. But his dark blond, carelessly parted hair fell beautifully over his forehead, and his forehead was beautiful, and wonderfully beautiful were his eyes.

His mouth, rightly considered, was beautiful, too; on the whole, as beautiful and childlike as his eyes.

The children returned, presented themselves and wanted cakes. At first their faces assumed the disdainful expression with which they were accustomed to terrify visitors. Renate, especially, mischievously drew her eyebrows together. Fridolin, who had surprisingly finished manners and awkward agility, asked with a crooked little bow: "We are not disturbing you, I hope?"—at which the strange young man laughed heartily. He was indeed soon on friendly terms with the children. He did not have that grown-up way of asking questions which made one feel that the answers were of no importance, and that they therefore had a merely rhetorical effect, and were usually answered briefly and crossly by the children. He looked at them

attentively and spoke to them as if they were interesting little colleagues. They soon became animated; Fridolin was already beginning to explain that his name was really "Mr. Dandelion," and that he was one of the richest directors of the Continent.

Christiane joined in the conversation. She was appealingly and sweetly joyous; dimples even appeared in her cheeks, and her eyes gleamed like mother-of-pearl. She asked Till how long he could stay and when he was expected back in the city.—But nobody expected him back, at most his brother. But he was dying, and when the end came, a telegram would surely call him. He was dying? Christiane was terrified and sad at that. "The poor man," she said gently, "he must be still young." But Till did not answer. "It is annoying," he said shortly. "I can never go too far from

the city where he lies in the hospital. For weeks he has put me off. The end may come any day.”—Christiane believed that she had not rightly understood him. She shuddered at the tone of his words. “Isn’t your mother in the neighborhood?” she asked shyly. But he replied harshly:

“No, our parents are dead. We have nobody, my brother and I.”—Suddenly she recognized again the expression which his eyes had had when he spoke of his unbelief.

Therefore he planned to stay here a few days, he told her carelessly. He was living in the “Café by the Woods,” which was not far from the villa of the lady. “I intend to work here a little,” he said slowly, looking ahead, “I must complete something, a small novel—yes, I write at times—for money, really only for the money—” As he pronounced it, the word “money”

was disturbing, at once full of hate and rapture. "I need a lot of money," he said and his eyes became darker as if in anger. "I never have any. I never have money; do you understand what that means? That is fearful, believe me, that is worse than the itch. Money has become the principle of life itself, inferior, detestable; it has become nauseating, within reach only of bad people, out of my reach, absolutely out of my reach. It doesn't stay with me, understand me well, it escapes me, it doesn't like me, it sticks to other people, it can't stand me——" He suddenly showed the children his worn shoes. He stretched his foot out from under the table "I need new shoes, too,"—and at that he laughed ominously and roughly. "I often earn money," he boasted, still laughing, "but my needs are complicated; there is so much to buy——" All four chil-

dren were still looking at his shoe—it was so cruelly prominent. It was pointed and of a bold pattern, and had formerly been very elegant. It was coquettishly ornamented with little holes at the edges.

Till, already happy again, said much more about himself, in a peculiarly ingenuous manner, while Christiane smiled and looked at him, and the children sat absorbed, as if at the opera. “At first I was a migratory bird,” he told them, “from my sixteenth to my eighteenth year. I wore a greenish cowl, and I believed with adamantine firmness that all confusion could be set right again with a little ethics. That was decidedly my happiest time.”

He spoke of every place in which he had lived since then; he spoke of Paris and Berlin, of Cairo and of Madrid. This had happened to him in New York, that in Tunis. When Christiane asked him how

old he was, he said: "Twenty-one,"—and was surprised that she laughed. And again and again he directed the conversation to the late head of the house, the dead master. Then his voice always became reverent and subdued. "Was he really witty?" he asked in a low voice and with a suspicious expression. "Yes, yes, I can imagine, often very mocking, often uncannily mocking." —He insisted on knowing which of the children reminded one of him, and in what features.

"I can indeed imagine that Renate has received his dark eyes and surely much of his dignity. Fridolin has inherited his strange roguishness. Heiner, too, surely reminds one of him in many ways, although he doesn't resemble him in appearance. But I imagine that is how he must have looked—" He spoke softly, so that the children would not hear him. He spoke

fondly and quietly to himself, not even turning to mama.

In the midst of the conversation he looked at the clock, noticed that it was already late, and apologized for having to leave. He became polite and conventional. Apt and gay words occurred to him. "It was charming, my dear lady," and: "Everything has really interested me tremendously." With a rather old-fashioned, lady-like gesture, smiling and hoping to see him again, she gave him her hand to kiss. He hoped so, too, and bent his mouth quickly over her extended hand, but when he raised his head again, he looked past her with a far-away gaze at the landscape. He wore a very soft, light-gray felt hat, far down over his forehead, and held a cigarette carelessly in his mouth. He looked almost suspicious, altogether too cosmopolitan, like one from the streets

and the cafés, with his hands in his trousers-pockets, and his boorish, insolent charm.

“Good-night, dearest lady,” he said again, and laughed past her, while she smilingly tried to intercept his glance.

The children asked whether they couldn’t accompany the gentleman as far as the “Café by the Woods.”

They went beside him down the stretch of highway. It was already nearly dark. He didn’t speak with them nor take his hands from his pockets. He whistled a long, sad melody. It went this way and that, fluttered up and down, became softer and louder, like a black solitary bird which was permitted to accompany him.

Before the entrance to the hotel he said good-by to the children in a friendly and quiet manner. He bent down only to Heiner and stroked his hair lightly.

Nor did the children say much on the way home.

When they reached home, mama had already retired. She sent her love by Fräulein Konstantine and said that she was tired.

CHAPTER IV

THE next morning the children insisted on visiting the strange young gentleman in the “Café by the Woods.” Mama protested, blushing, without the children’s knowing why. “That is impossible,” she said, smiling timidly, but her smile was not meant for the children; she smiled simply to herself, confused and happy.—But this time Heiner was energetic. He had never yet seen a hotel room, he asserted obstinately, and he insisted on having his way. It was important: he wouldn’t be denied. “Yes, if there is no way out,” said mama,—and she was already standing in front of the mirror—“then let us go.” In reality, no one had asked mama to join

the excursion. But the children were satisfied and they set out. Mama reproached herself many times, complained and lamented until they had reached the little hotel. "It is very wrong of you, dear children," she bewailed in a dull voice, mechanically, and as if her thoughts were elsewhere, "the gentleman will be frightfully alarmed—"

It was the beginning of April, a windy spring day. Piles of discolored snow still lay on the edge of the highway and also on the brownish meadows. Everything was wet and they tramped through dirt. Many brooks and rivulets crossed the meadows. The naked trees shook themselves, laughing. Mama likewise gave a silvery and excited laugh, because the wind was bent on disarranging her hair. She stumbled along, laughing and holding her hands in front of her hair for protection.

The children laughed with her. All five laughed exultantly. Laughing, they greeted the stout hostess of the "Café by the Woods." And now up the steps, where there was a smell of greasy hotel cooking, a knock at number seventeen, and without waiting for the "come in," they flung open the door and burst into the room at a double-quick pace.

Till ran to meet them in his black pajamas. He was barefooted, had a dripping wet face, and was swinging his towel like a banner. "There you are!" he cried, and laughed, because the children laughed so, "I am just washing myself—don't mind me—" He ran back to the wash-basin, and while the children surrounded him, he plunged his face deep into the water.

But where was mama? Mama had stayed below. Had she changed her mind during the laughter? Had she mischiev-

ously hidden somewhere? Or had she run home? What foolishness! The children cried for her, and Till ran out with them to the hall, dripping wet.

“Mama, where are you?” cried the children. And he interjected: “Where are you, mama?” But she had gone, had disappeared, and all the shouting was of no avail. “We’ll get along without her, all right,” laughed Till, and they ran back into the room.

He dressed while the children rummaged in his things. They had never before seen such a jumble of periodicals, pamphlets and books.

The “Will to Power” lay beside the “Berlin Illustrated Magazine,” the New Testament beside an American fashion journal, a work on sex pathology beside Buddha’s speeches, books on natural sci-

ence beside dubious new Parisian novels; also pamphlets on Russia, many photographs, cubist drawings and dolls. The children excitedly turned the pages of all the journals, screamed with fear and joy at expressionistic reproductions, and giggled as they turned their attention to comical title-pages, and to prominent names. Half dressed, Till went up to them. Laughing with them, he surveyed the confused mass of books and magazines.

"Yes, yes, I am a young European intellectual!" he said, and his laugh was ringing and hearty.

He was hardly dressed when he declared: "Now we will go bathing." But this plan horrified the children. All four together protested that it was impossible, that bathing was not to be thought of at all before May, and that only a short time ago ice was still on the Klammer Pond.

“You will get cramps from the cold!” Renate prophesied precociously.—But Till said they would see, and was already down the steps.

The swimming-woman sat in front of her little house, suspecting nothing wrong. How could she expect such a terrible surprise? “But, young gentleman, young gentleman!” she croaked, spitting, “you’ll get the worst diphtheria. I am telling you just how it is!” Renate heartily agreed with her, and Fridolin became spiteful and malicious. “By Mecca and Medina!” he cursed Orientally, “do what you can’t help doing!” Till couldn’t stop laughing. He showed all his tricks to the old woman. He cajoled her with caresses and fantastic expressions of affection. Nor could Renate succeed in quieting him. For Heiner’s sake he would have abandoned his intention soonest, since Heiner had become quite

still and distressed; "If only you are not harmed!" he said softly.

Finally he succeeded in coaxing the old woman to give him a pair of bathing-trunks. Already he had vanished in the dressing-booth. The old woman, disconcerted, still chatted to herself that such a thing had never happened to her before, and "in this windy weather!" There he was already running across the spring-board. It quivered under his step, he laughed and shivered, and even as he jumped off, beckoned, laughing, to the children. With a flourish he turned a somersault in the air—he gleamed in the air—then the water spurted up and Till had disappeared. The children were frightened. Now it had happened, the cramp. They had known it. Heiner did not say another word, but his face became white and he trembled so that his teeth

chattered. But already Till was emerging from the water, surprisingly far away, puffing out his cheeks, snorting and laughing. He was swimming along with powerful strokes.

Who was that running across the meadows? That was mama, but her face was frantic. She came up panting. She scolded even from a distance. "That is really outrageous!" she called, quite out of breath, "such a thing, that is really outrageous!" She stopped by the children, putting her arms with a large gesture about Renate and Heiner. "He certainly wanted to force you to bathe with him!" she scolded in a broken and discordant voice. "That is horrible of him,—that is a low trick—" But the movement with which she protected the children was unnatural and rigid. Her eyes did not fol-

low them; they followed the swimmer who was now swimming back to the shore with long strokes. "He'll surely catch his death of cold," Christiane said suddenly, softly complaining, and she took her hands from the children's shoulders.

Till was already on land, dripping with water. Naked, with wind-blown hair, he came up to Christiane. "I am not here to pay attention to you," she complained, disconcerted, "kill yourself if you wish—but my children! I know that you wanted to lead them into this madness, too." And again she made the unnatural and exaggerated gesture with which she had drawn the children to her.

Now Till stood directly opposite to her. He merely laughed; he didn't answer. His body trembled like that of a young stallion, which pauses after the gallop. His breast heaved, his splendid laugh heaved,

too. He was breathless, laughing like a runner who is first at the goal. The red bathing-trunks made his body seem even more naked and more nearly undressed than if he had been entirely unclothed. His childlike and shameless laugh at this peculiar sort of nakedness made Christiane feel like sinking down with shame. How was it possible to evade this glance? Why did the ground not open up now?

She put her hands behind her and everything became black before her eyes. The bathing-woman hurried to her aid. The children looked with terror into the chalky-white face of their swooning mother.

* * * *

The less she understood him, the more she loved him. She could sit for hours, as if in a trance—with the single thought: Now I love him. Now I love him. Even if she had thought it thousands and thou-

sands of times, it was always an overwhelmingly new, extraordinary thought: Now I love him.

Really he was more her children's friend than hers. He got along with them from the first; they agreed in every respect with almost uncanny naturalness. He was soon initiated into the complicated web of their games. He was conversant with everything, and was now certainly "Uese-land's" mightiest patron and "Klie-Klie's" most dangerous enemy. He had portentous conversations with millionaire Dandelion. He was gallant and bold to Fräulein Lieschen Hirselmann. He could amuse the venturesome Baroness Baudessin with sporting and spirited anecdotes. But a gentler and more delicate friendship united him with Heiner. One could often see the two walking around together in the garden. Sometimes Heiner would set out, very

small and solitary, to visit Till in the “Café by the Woods.”

Till took extended walks with the children, far beyond the Zwicker peasant’s place, roving aimlessly about the country. They went through woods, through new woods with which the children were not acquainted at all, and where the trees seemed gigantic and alive to them.

On such walks he could tell stories that were more amazing and strange than the children had ever dreamed of. “It would be better to have lived in earlier times,” said Till to the children, “much earlier times—millions of years ago. There were at that time still no human beings at all, even those ape-men were not alive then; they did not come into existence until millenniums later, and were already very similar to us, shrewd and malicious fellows. At the very beginning there was an island,

Godwana; it lay where now there is only water—the island then was where the sea is now. There lived the first creatures from whom we have evolved, in the course of millions of years. They had scaly skins and large beaks, wings and claws, also gigantic eyes, whose glance no one could stand to-day. They all hated each other, and when mischance brought them together, a prodigious rumbling and murmuring went over the island. They were large like the mountains. I think their eyes were of a tremendously deep blue, with golden lights in them. If one of these first grumbling creatures should appear in Europe, all Europe would begin to weep under the spell of this glance. It was of a gigantic innocence, it was as touching as it was fearful. The whole weeping, contrite Europe,” Till concluded, laughing, “the giant would swallow up at

one gulp. Yes, such were the first creatures: tremendously innocent and tremendously greedy—" He stopped laughing, stared ahead at the grass with lonely eyes.

In the evening they decided to frighten mama, so they plundered the theater chest and all put on masks. When mama entered her bedroom at night, turned on the light and lingered at her door, engrossed with fervent dreams and thoughts, the hubbub suddenly broke out from every corner. Fridolin hopped out from under the bed in a fiery red monk's robe. Heiner appeared triumphantly from the wardrobe, half-naked and swinging a scepter. Lieschen and Renate danced with black masks.—Christiane thought she had lost her reason. She did not doubt that a hallucination was mocking her, and could only stare, trembling and without screaming. But as a climax, the fire-screen fell over and Till

stood gleaming behind it. He had on a silver harness, and screamed out belligerently, his sparkling arms outstretched. Christiane reeled and paled; only when the five formed a circle about her and danced exultantly, did she begin to laugh. She laughed immoderately and weakly, but she might just as well have wept.

* * * *

She soon felt fatigued by the children. The mysterious understanding which united them constantly with Till, annoyed her. She was jealous, and she did not dare to admit it to herself.

But when she was alone with Till, every word that he said terrified her, and the problems with which he wrestled were painfully beyond her horizon. He spoke much of Soviet Russia and of America, and his eyes became brooding as he spoke.

“However, to-day every one must really

decide between the two," he said with vehemence and exasperation and she did not know what he meant.—"Those are the two powers that control the situation to-day. And Europe between them, what a dangerous position. And poor Europe between them!"

At times he interjected great radical words and abruptly and irrelevantly, and that troubled her almost more. "Our youth," he said suddenly, "has indeed taken so much credit for its problematic age and for its confused situation. But we are in reality perhaps the most unproblematic youth which ever existed. We merely talk about problems, but we do not believe in them at all. We believe only in life—and in death——"

What he related from his past was strange and horrible to her. He boasted

of how cleverly he understood stealing. "Yes," he said gayly, "now I have that off my chest. I flirt with the servant girl, and while she winks and laughs, I take what I like: whisky bottles, nice English cakes, charming perfumes—" What was Christiane to reply to that? He spoke with gay nonchalance of erotic abnormalities that she thought reprehensible. He could not control his laughter, because she did not know what a "transvestite" was. He was often very much irritated because she called homosexual love "abnormal" compared with heterosexual. He was inclined to become insulting when she contradicted him. He said: "Yes—of course you are appreciably older than I—" and he looked cruelly past her. Then she could only lapse into pained silence. She was indeed the aging woman who desired a boy.

The less she could follow his restless dis-

cussions, the more she desired him every day.

When he played with her children in the garden, she stood by the window and merely looked at him. She loved each of his movements. She loved his hair, his hands, his mouth, his eyes, his eyebrows, his voice, his rapid, agitated way of speaking, his rudeness, his laugh, his melancholy, his restless and depraved face.

What was his attitude toward her? He had managed to introduce himself here as an admirer of her husband. He lived here in the neighborhood, but she did not know him. Was he not an extremely questionable playmate for her children, with his vicious street-urchin's mouth? Fräulein Konstantine had already come to warn her. "The new comrade of your children—" she began, sternly and crossly. He had never shown a trace of interest in

her, in Christiane ; her experiences did not interest him. He did not speak of her. He did not care about what was happening to her. He is cruel, she said to herself, he must know how I am situated. Why doesn't he leave? He is bad, a bad man.

But she knew with every fiber of her heart that he was good. She said to herself : he is dissolute, he is an embodiment of vices, without law, without order.—But her words were stupid, and she fell silent. He was better than she, and she loved him more than her life.

She often wanted to ask him whether he was satisfied, since he made her suffer so much. She didn't dare to, but he answered her of his own accord. How could she comprehend his nature ; how were his contradictions to be explained? She had believed that he was passionately in love with life, since he was so unreservedly, so law-

lessly, so wholly devoted to it.—Fear of life, hatred of life suddenly burst out in him. They were sitting quietly side by side, when he suddenly began to speak: “It is a shame, it is a shame, you know, that we are alive. Non-existence was calm and good; it revolved in its goodness, quiet, peaceable and nameless. Then something stirred, evil, convulsive movements—what devil had accomplished that? What devil had transformed life into nothingness? For what did he take revenge? For what must they atone, who are condemned to life? It is a disease, an abominable curse—” And then suddenly breaking out in a childlike and primitive lament: “I should like so much to die—I should like so much to be dead—I am so disgusted—”

Her affection for him was greater than her fear. She felt at such moments that

she knew more than he, although he was so clever. Often she did not understand his words, but she understood his lonely and despairing glance.

It made her happiest of all when he often became quieter at her side. They went walking together in the evening until their path led them down as far as the river.

That was the night. Lights floated on it. The river came past. Lights floated on it, too. They lay in rocking repose as it flowed past. The infrequent sounds came across from a workshop: a hammering, the barking of a dog, far away. There was wind in the trees. The good trees breathed in the wind. The country breathed in the night.

CHAPTER V

CHRISTIANE's nature did not change so that she became restless, violent, passionate, and burning-eyed, because of this love and this great desire which grew continually in her heart. She went about even more quietly than usual, resting, calmly waiting. She had almost become an animal, but one did not know what animal. With calm gaze she walked through the garden paths, a white, heavy and enraptured animal. At times she halted, raised her head, raised her hands, stretched with joy because she loved him. She thought of his name so ardently that it filled the air like something corporeal, and hung in her like a color.

When she had been alone all day, and darkness came in the evening, it seemed to her that she had learned to love him even more ardently during the day. Had her love not been small and violent in the morning, a hissing straw fire? But now it spread out, became darker and heavier; now it grew.

Her children scarcely knew her any more. When she saw them playing somewhere in the garden they seemed strange and odious to her, lean, intrusive creatures. The children noticed it and avoided her anxiously. At meals their eyes clung shyly and searchingly to the new expression of their mother's face. They did not know this half-opened mouth; this blissful and dazed glance troubled them. Mama's heavy, vacant, smiling face which she bent over her plate, the gentle, sleep-walking gestures that her white, rather large hands

made in using knife and fork attracted them and at the same time seemed repulsive.

Christiane paid no heed to her four children; now she was not a mother. Her whole body and her whole soul waited for the conception of the fifth child.

The need of praying, which had always been strong in her, grew with the desire for his body. She sat with the rosary between her fingers and spoke with God for hours. Not for a second could doubt arise in her heart that she was nearer than ever to His favor and glory in these days of anticipated bliss.



She kissed him on the terrace after supper, just as soon as the children had retired. Till was still sitting silently at the table, his chin resting on his hands. She felt that now the hour had come, so she

went up to him and placed her arms about him. She closed her eyes, and there came over her again the deep fear of his glance which she could never understand. She knew that it would be still hard and inexplicable when she encountered it.

As her mouth was laid on his, his lips were dry and cold, and his mouth did not open. But with shudders of happiness she felt its harsh taste. Finally his mouth yielded, and his firmly closed lips parted. Finally he, too, closed his eyes, and now she felt his hands on her body. Her happiness was so great that she felt like weeping on his mouth.

But already she was being pushed back. He thrust her away from him with his whole body, and going backward, he fled from her until his hands clutched the balustrade. In the gesture of fleeing his body was so tense that it almost appeared

as if he were reaching out toward her. He stood there before the darkness of the garden as if he wanted to flee from her into the night. But it seemed to her that he was coming toward her out of the night.

Therefore she went up to him in deepest humility, not sparing herself any steps. Silently she met his wide-open and horrified eyes. Now quite close, she begged him, simply, shyly, but confidently, as if it could not be otherwise: "Now come with me."

She went slowly, heavily up the stairs, her head lowered, her arms hanging down. He, behind her, as if something were forcing him to follow, and he were loath to do it. He, too, went with deeply bowed face, but with firmly set teeth, while her open lips smiled.

She sat on the edge of the bed and undressed. The photographs of the children,

gazing seriously, stood on the night-table in a leather frame. Over the bed hung the white death-mask of her husband, with the large nose, the relentless mouth, the pure, gleaming brow.

Her lover was standing in the middle of the room. The bright night flowed through the open balcony door, and in its bluish light he was standing as if in water. He stretched, shivering. His body was quite lean; every rib was visible. The muscles on his knees quivered. His feet, pressed close together, were cold on the carpet.

But she, in bed, did not dare to look at him any longer. She closed her eyes. A thought came to her, which she no longer dared retain; she trembled at its overpowering sweetness. From where was he sent? Did not she recognize him, the angel who brought disquiet into her cham-

ber? Then she was called Mary and awaited the conception.

He went slowly to her bed, as if he were merely seeking warmth. Only then did she look into his face. His eyes still had a hard gleam, but now a gentler smile played about his half-open mouth. She took both of his hands. She didn't know whether they were glowing hot or quite cold. She only felt that they quivered.

Then there arose in her, with ever-increasing strength, a different feeling, one which she had had before. But it now awoke to consciousness with intensity and vigor, it expanded and it seemed deeper, more affecting than all physical love.

Sympathy for his body filled her heart, a sympathy so great that it threatened to burst her heart: *because his body stood there in the night.* She could have wept

because he had such shoulders, such thin arms, which he folded shivering over his breast, such adorable knees, such a forehead, over which his short hair hung moist. That was his body which he had inherited, which had to live, had to hold its own, freeze, yearn, rejoice. That was his animate body, the only one which he had, and that had to stand here in the night.

Nothing in the wide, sad world seemed to her sadder than to be in this condition. All sorrow, of which anything could be asserted, came from the mind, could be explained and, therefore, was insignificant. But this other, this sorrow of the body was beyond the petty intellect, inexplicable and great.

The tenderness with which she now stroked his body was full of this sympathy. She crouched, half-upright, in bed, and her hands lay on his hips. “Come to me!”

she begged from below. But he only shook his head.

A second time she begged him to come to warm himself and not to stand proudly and shiver. The third time he yielded, and she drew him down to her.

And he was more wonderful to her than anything else, when she could wrap him in the blankets, wrap him up warm to his neck. "Are you comfortable now?" she asked again and again. "Are you still cold?"

Now he turned his face to her, and his eyes were as ardent as if he had been waiting years for this hour.

* * * *

Much later, long after he had fallen asleep by her side, she still lay awake. With her head lying on her arms, she caressed his body once more, but this time with her eyes. In the intoxication of her

solicitude, she did not forget the tiniest place on his body.

Now she felt that she had a slight intuition, a small thought which seemed to her beautiful and worth retaining. "There are two kinds of life," she thought slowly, "the static and the dynamic. There are two kinds of longing: the active and the passive. When the static and the dynamic life marry: that is conception."

She smiled rapturously, because she believed a clever thought had come to her, and yet she had always considered herself stupid. Smiling happily, she lay down in the pillows.

She suddenly recalled many nights of love with her husband. She saw his large face above her, which she had almost feared, the black, gleaming eyes, the gigantic nose, the sharp mouth, which paid precise and ecstatic homage to her beauty

In these almost unbearably great nights the fear-inspiring dynamic power of his spirit had taken possession of her static body.

Now, however, she was bending again and again over this strange, adored face which was sleeping.

Which of the two had she known less? She trembled in the cold morning, alone at his side.

Above her, the death-mask of her husband, with the austere severity of its mouth, dreamed on into the dawn its dreams that were as serious as death.

CHAPTER VI

TILL came the next morning when Christiane was still sitting before the mirror with her hair over her shoulders. He had on a gray traveling cloak, a light, blue-silk scarf about his neck and a small yellow leather satchel in his hand. "I am only coming to take my leave," he said, stopping at the door. She did not turn around at all, but merely stared at his image in the mirror. He stood quietly by the door with his handbag. She asked dully: "How is that? Have you news of your brother?" He replied: "No, but it is necessary for me to leave." Christiane did not stir, she did not scream and she could not weep. After a long, long time,

while she sat motionless as stone, she asked softly: "May I not go along?" Then he smiled from the mirror. Thus his fair face was above the vivid blue of her shawl, his face with the wide-open, lonely eyes, and over them the black, arched brows drawn up so that his forehead was slightly wrinkled. And this sad, perplexed, anxious and charming smile played about his mouth. She saw him coming closer to her from behind. Now he was standing behind her chair. Would he bend down and kiss her? But he merely stroked her long, wonderful, flowing hair. With a fleeting and gentle tenderness he let it glide through his fingers. She turned around and looked directly into his face. She said: "I shall never understand why you do that." But she said it weakly and with hardly any expression, against her better knowledge, softly, as if it were a lie. He

did not reply to that either; he was looking past her with his wide, animal-like, mysterious eyes. "Yes, I must go away," he said, letting her hair slip from his hands.

He went into the "schoolroom," where the children were studying with teacher Burkhardt, to say good-by to them, too. All four stood in a row opposite to him. For a long time they could not comprehend that he was about to leave, and when they realized it, their eyes immediately filled with tears. "But we shall see each other again," he consoled his friends, "you will be grown up so soon—then we shall meet in the big cities—" They understood that and rejoiced at this prospect. He gave each one his hand, but when he reached Heiner, he bent lower and kissed him on the forehead. Heiner smiled happily at that, while he was still strug-

gling with tears. His mouth quivered appealingly, his eyes gleamed joyously, although big tears were running down his cheeks.

Mama had put on a gray traveling gown, which she seldom wore, to accompany Till to the train. It was distinctive, but not very modern, made of fine, soft cloth, with a long, full skirt. Her gray hat was high and peculiar. Christiane's face was absolutely colorless, white and transparent, as if of a choice and rare material; and her eyes, uncannily dark beneath the white forehead, gleamed almost black.

In silence they traversed the meadow path. They went slowly, as Till had to carry his bag. The distance was not great; they turned in from the main street, and already the dirty little railroad station lay before them. Now they had to

stand side by side on the platform and wait until the train arrived. But it could only be a few minutes now. What more did they have to communicate to each other? They did not have another word to say, not another syllable to utter. They already knew everything, and yet they knew so frightfully little, that it would have been senseless to employ words. Words were insufficient and banal.

Peasant women about them were busy with baskets of eggs; even calves were being shipped. Railroad officials assumed an air of importance, disputes arose, a fat gentleman threatened excitedly. Christiane could no longer wait for the train to come. Eagerly she counted each second. At the same time, she trembled with fear when it occurred to her that it would surely have to come. She considered it really impossible; a miracle occurred, the

train was derailed, many died—but *he* was prevented from leaving, *his* departure was made impossible, corpses intervened, he had to stay, he stayed—

Already the train was there, it came roaring in, it whistled and it steamed; stinking and black, it filled the little station. The conductor cried loudly. “Two minutes stop!” he yelled again and again. Gray, blasé faces appeared at the compartment windows, mocking the little station.

Till bent over Christiane’s hand as quickly as that first time on the veranda. He straightened up and again he looked past her into the distance. He ran to the train, his haste was great. Now his face appeared beside a strange one at the window.

As the train got under way, Christiane screamed, and ran along a few quick steps

by the moving train. "Can't I come along? I have on my traveling dress—" And with a great, despairing gesture she pointed to her old-fashioned dress. Indeed, she had found a costume, which she had used before only in traveling. And now she had disclosed this secret, too. Was he answering? His last words were swallowed up by the sounds of the departing train. But with a final dark, extremely poignant glance, her eyes embraced his vanishing face for the last time.

The train disappeared around the corner. The little station was deserted again.

How could she move now? How should she get home?



She got home without knowing how. Hadn't she stumbled over the streets? Hadn't street-urchins ridiculed her and

peasant women pointed their fingers at her? How had she gotten past her own children who were waiting for her in the garden, and what could she have said to them? Now she was in her room, slowly closing the window blinds. Only no light now, only to see nothing, and not to move —to sit in the dark.

She besought the mercy of tears, but tears did not come to her. She sat in the dark room and let the hours pass. One might have thought that a heavy doll was sitting in the middle of the room. But no one dared to come to her, no one opened her door. The time passed without her noticing how it passed. Her pain consumed time and was stronger than it. Pain was stronger than everything; all things were made of pain. She sat and suffered. This suffering was her whole life, every breath was suffering. “Non-existence was

quiet and good," she thought slowly, "quiet, peaceable and nameless, it revolved in its goodness. Then something stirred, there were painful convulsions. Tears fell into the void. God wept in his loneliness. Non-existence received God's dreams, as the woman the seed of man. Then it bore life. All life is cheerless, all life is truly desolate. What curse must those condemned to life atone for?" She did not stir, she was not hungry, she sat and suffered.

The day passed. In the middle of the night she rose from her chair, went to the window and pushed back the blinds. She bent down in the warm night. Mild and animate darkness came toward her after the oppressiveness and closeness of her room. Then something relaxed in her, she raised her hands out into the night, holding them in the darkness, as if that could

afford consolation. When she felt the wind on her face, she began at last to weep. Also she whispered his name for the first time, she whispered it, weeping into the night.

She went back to her chair, sat down weeping, and soon fell asleep.

She dreamed of Till. It was a brief but splendid dream. She saw Till run up a mountain. It was hard for him, he panted, but ran quickly. He was dressed like a young proletarian who is faring badly. Gray rags hung about him, revealing the tan leanness of his body. But he had on a silver helmet, a large, sparkling soldier's helmet which almost covered his eyes. He was barefooted and his feet were already bleeding. He was running over stones and thorns. Who were those little figures that pursued him? They were Renate and Heiner, Fridolin and Lieschen.

All four wore the disguises in which they had frightened their mother so much that time. The mountain was high. What goal could be beckoning up there? More children joined the procession, naked children, and children in gay tatters. The leader, Till, did not turn around toward them, but only ran tirelessly on, with bleeding feet and gleaming helmet. The throng of children behind him became denser and denser, the naked boys with disheveled hair and little girls in gay smocks; thousands of children, thousands of tense, lean, running, shouting children's bodies.—Christiane longed to see the goal toward which he was leading them. She did not recognize the goal, which was hidden from her. She heard only the rejoicing, panting, and exulting, with which the runners looked forward to it. Till stopped, and turned around; he now stood opposite to

the vanguard of the shouting children. He snatched off his helmet, he looked over them. He was the duke of the children. He measured their hosts with wide and gleaming eyes. Then he turned about and ran on.

* * * * *

Now days passed, weeks passed. Christiane again took walks with her children, and consulted with Afra in the kitchen. People probably noticed the strangely absent gaze which her eyes had assumed, her slow way of walking, of looking up, and of smiling distantly and mildly.

It was the hottest summer in a long time. The dusty highways glowed, the earth was cracked and gray. The trees longed for refreshment as they stood, dry and languishing in the blue heat of these weeks. The garden was still, only from the Klammer Pond was the sound of swimmers audi-

ble. The children, too, had gone bathing. Christiane sat alone in the heat.

She knew now that she was pregnant. She felt no joy at that, and she felt absolutely incapable of new pain. She accepted it dully and almost without comprehending it.

The summer hummed about her. The air quivered blue. Beetles ran indolently over the grass. The sunflowers held their heavy heads wearily. Outside, a bent, aged peasant woman went slowly past. "If another child does come into the world," Christiane thought languidly, "nothing is changed by that. If another is to bear the suffering of this earth——"

Now her brother would perhaps soon arrive. She had written that she needed him.

CHAPTER VII

Then mama's brother, Gaston, had suddenly arrived before the children had suspected anything. She seemed to have expected him for a long time, only she had never spoken of it. When they greeted each other at the station, she was seen to pale with joy. "Here you are at last!" was all she said, but with a sigh, as if somebody were now there, for whom she had long yearned.

The children looked rather shyly and timidly at the young uncle whom they hardly knew. They believed he was handsomer than any man they had ever seen; in his way he was much, much handsomer than mama herself. The colors in his face,

especially about the eyes, were different from those of ordinary people. Moreover, the dark red of his serious mouth was of a surprising, almost painful beauty.

He bent over mama's hand, saying only a few words, but he kissed it with the greatest courtesy and with profound gravity. At first he was very reserved toward the children. To be sure, he smiled at them, but his smile seemed even more formidable to them than his immobile face.

They walked together along the meadow path, in spite of the damp coolness of the evening. Mama and her brother went arm in arm and without speaking. Gaston wore a dark, rather wide cloak, the high collar of which was turned up. He had pulled his rakish hat far down over his face. His gait was peculiarly elastic, not really graceful, heavy and yet winged. He had broken off a long switch for him-

self and looked just as if he came from the mountains and had been tending goats on lonely heights and had been jesting with white cows.

The children covertly took counsel as to how old he might be. Heiner assured them that he was mama's younger brother, not older than the middle twenties. But Renate insisted with astonishing earnestness that he must be older. She conceded him thirty-three or thirty-four years.

At supper the places at the table were so arranged that mama and uncle Gaston sat at the ends of the table opposite each other, while Renate and Heiner, Fridolin and Lieschen took their seats together at the sides. The table was festively adorned, and there was good food. Fräulein Konstantine had been asked to dine out.

There was little talking at table. Beside Uncle Gaston lay the ancient dog,

Luxi, over whose thin, white hair his noble, rather large hands often glided with absent-minded affection. The children examined again and again with brief, dark, intense glances, the face of their strange uncle.

After the meal Uncle Gaston and mama remained sitting for a long time on the veranda. They didn't converse much, only a few words now and then, but these seemed to be jocular, for they often laughed softly. But they were so much absorbed in thought that they did not even notice the approach of night. They did not turn on the electric light even when one could scarcely recognize the figure of the other. They sat opposite each other, scarcely visible.

"Is papa cross?" Christiane asked, laughing softly in the darkness. "I don't see him often," her brother answered.

"To be sure, when I do see him, he generally scrapes and stamps—" They did not mention their father again.

They went walking in the nocturnal garden. The white paths gleamed through the darkness, so that one could not miss them. But the black bushes often met above them, so that here and there they lay in a sudden deep shade.—What should Christiane and Gaston tell each other? Should she ask him about his experiences in the large cities? Surely, he had had the same experience as she, only in a different way, and perhaps more than once. Between them was that quiet and mysterious bond, which exists only between brothers and sisters. One understood and knew what the other had suffered; words were unnecessary. She did not even mention Till's name, and he did not speak of anything that had happened to him. She

asked only about the most commonplace matters: whether he was successful and what the theaters were doing. They told each other little stories of their youth together, and laughed at them.

It was good that he was there.

* * * *

Now came blissful late-summer weeks, after heat and stupor had weighed so heavily on every one. Mama's glance changed again: the absent-minded and far-away expression finally left it. She was often seen walking on the arm of her handsome brother. Fräulein Konstantine and Afra noticed the "distinguished couple." At any rate, Herr Gaston did not give any clue to the origin of their mistress. Was their father, whom they mentioned at times so carelessly, an old count, or a circus-clown or a prompter in a theater, where Gaston played the lovers' rôles?

The children built palaces in the sand, and mama walked up to them with their uncle. For the first time in a long while she spoke to them with her former cordiality. "We are building a palace for Till," Heiner related with glowing cheeks, "so that he can live in it, when he comes again—just look: with nothing but subterranean passages, and above them are marble dance-halls—" Mama bent far over to look into the subterranean palace. "Yes," was all she said, "all passages and halls—"

She proceeded, on the arm of her brother. A great tranquillity filled the air; now she could even speak of him. "I am anxious about him, you know," she said softly, "his soul is so restless, and his heart so unruly—"

They stopped by the aster-bed; a walk soon tired Christiane. Her brother looked

at the flowers that nodded to one another, dark-yellow, dark-red—and white. Christiane leaned on him; she was already heavier, and even standing taxed her strength. “I wonder if it will be a boy?” she asked suddenly, and smiled. Her brother did not look up from the flowers, but he, too, smiled.

CHAPTER VIII

ON their walks with Fräulein Konstantine, the children occasionally got into the cemetery where they liked to walk as much as anywhere else. They thought nothing of it; it was not very different from city pleasure-grounds. And Fräulein Konstantine maintained her usual air of bored disdain. They read the inscriptions from the tombstones, in a manner at once respectful and amused:—"Elizabeth Städele, daughter of a land-owner. May she rest in peace."—"Anton Schallmeyer, master baker. May he rest in peace."—The names were often comical, and often plain, but that did not concern them. "Here rests in peace—" that was a mere

phrase, a saying; that had nothing to do with death.—The children had never yet seen a corpse.

There were two cemeteries, the old one, within the town, in the neighborhood of the market-place, and the new one, farther out on the edge of the woods. The children knew there was “no more room” in the old cemetery, and that it had been full for decades. Here, the tombstones were mostly blackish and rough, for the survivors themselves were no longer living, or they had moved to the cities, and nobody was left to take care of the tombstones.—But the new cemetery was at once spacious and idyllic. Touching, dainty and coquettish forget-me-not wreaths lay on the stones, on which one read that a child, a little girl, or a little boy rested here in peace. Moreover, the likeness of the departed appeared on the tombstone, so that

one could see that Anton Schallmeyer looked thus, bearded and plain—and Lisbeth Kunz, who remained single until her death, had this prim and maidenly look.

The burial hall extended around the cemetery in white arcades.

One morning when the four children went walking with their nurse in the new cemetery, first between the new tombstones, and then under the white archway, they happened to see the dead journeyman baker.

They had already noticed at a distance the white arrangement, the bier, the cloths and the many wreaths. But they did not recognize until the last moment that a white young man lay among the many artificial wreaths. They stopped, and nobody ventured to say a word; even Fräulein Konstantine appeared daunted.

The young man's waxen hands were

folded on the white cover. He was covered to the chin. But that did not suffice: the lower part of his face was firmly enveloped in a white cloth, as far as his nose, which had already become severe. Only his icy forehead, his relentlessly and proudly closed eyes, and his pointed, aristocratic nose were visible among the ugly wreaths.

Disconcerted, Fräulein Konstantine said in an unnatural tone: "Yes—he was placed here on a bier—he will be buried this afternoon—" Renate was the first to ask in hoarse, anxious accents: "Who is it, then—who was it, then?"—Fräulein Konstantine naturally knew all about it; she liked to be able to talk. "It is the journeyman baker, Friedel Müller. He was drowned day before yesterday evening while swimming. He was bathing in the river after supper—yes, he had probably eaten too much—I believe that caused a stroke.—

But do come," she said uncertainly, almost pleading with them, "do come—why are you stopping?"

The children did not move. All four stared at the strange, wrapped face. "Why have they bound up his mouth?" Renate asked again, and gloomily awaited the answer. Fräulein Konstantine was obliging, even humble, as never before. "Yes, yes," she said quickly, "Yes, yes,—to be sure—that is probably because his mouth is open—he was drowned, you know——"

Suddenly Heiner's whole body began to tremble. Yes, that was it: his mouth was open. He knew a black, complaining mouth was concealed under the white cloth.—Heiner's eyes stared at the face of the journeyman baker more intently than they had ever stared at any person's face. His eyes had changed as he gazed: they

had become harder, a blue, defiant, and brooding hardness. He set his teeth so firmly that two muscles stood out giving his face a manlier appearance. His whole body trembled with fear, but he stood before the corpse with a new, stern expression which his face would not have to assume until much, much later.

Renate's glance rested full and dark upon the waxen countenance. Fridolin displayed a somber interest, as if one had shown him a horrible and beautiful curiosity, a gay and grotesque nine days' wonder, from which he could not turn his eyes.

Fräulein Konstantine begged once more earnestly: "Do come—now you have seen him—" Then the eyes of the children finally turned reluctantly from the face which fascinated them, and they went home in silence.

* * * *

But at night Heiner could not get to sleep for a long time. A fear clutched him, more frightful, more implacable than he had ever known. Not the fear of ghosts, which came winter nights. That was unimportant and did not matter.— This time it was the fear of death, worse than that: the horrible and henceforth inexorable fear that all life was destined to die, even his hands, even his face, even his body.

When he closed his eyes the journeyman baker's face appeared above him, but now without the band. The black mouth gaped and laughed: it was painfully wide open, complaining, and lamenting above his bed. Sobbing, Heiner asked the icy-cold face above him: "Tell me: must I, too, die sometime?"—And the eternally gaping mouth replied: "It may be to-night." Then Heiner screamed disconsolately in his bed.

Mama was sitting gently beside him, comforting him by stroking his hand. Then he felt like weeping. "We can die any day," he told mama, sobbing in his perplexity, "every one of us—perhaps there will soon be no more people——"

But mama, sitting heavily in a chair at his side, replied calmly: "But to make up for that, new ones are always being born—" She bent over her weeping son, and suddenly her tranquil face was also wet with tears. She said again, more softly, shuddering at her secret:

"But to make up for that, new ones are always being born——"

* * * * *

The next morning Gaston said to his sister that he would leave on the following day.

CHAPTER IX

SOME time after the carriage had left the garden with mama and her handsome brother, the children hit upon the idea of playing wedding. They had not taken any game so seriously for a long time.

When the four were lying in the grass, without finding much to talk about, and idly waiting for coming events and fantastic adventures that could rouse them, Heiner said abruptly: "I want to marry Renate to-day."

Nobody laughed. Renate lowered her eyes with deep gravity. "But I haven't given my consent yet," she said primly. However, Heiner knew how to smile winningly. "You will surely not say no," he

said in a friendly manner, "you know, you have no other suitor."—To that Renate could naturally make no further objection. "I believe mama, too, has now married again," Heiner said after a pause, in a lower, hesitating voice, bending somewhat lower over the grass, with which he was playing. They all nodded, even Lieschen, although her eyes betrayed no comprehension.

The celebration was to take place in a quarter of an hour, and careful preparations were being made for this ceremony. Lieschen was bridesmaid, and at the same time she had to attend to the banquet, which was planned on a most sumptuous scale. She obtained white cake dough from Afra, which she kneaded in attractive forms and distributed on little glass plates. She also cut apples into delicious slices, grouped half rolls temptingly be-

tween, so that the whole arrangement produced an appetizing and unique effect. What should Fridolin represent if not the priest? Malicious and pious like the wicked Grand Inquisitor, he wrapped himself in his black rain cloak. He improvised a crucifix from twigs, and stood, thus, barefooted and strange, on the kitchen stool, which served as the altar, and awaited his victims.

But Renate was still adorning herself. She had decided to put on her white linen Sunday dress without Fräulein Konstantine's noticing it. She also placed a big red aster awkwardly in her hair. Thus bedecked and encumbered, she came down the garden path. She had, however, not combed her hair; she was a tousled, thin little bride. Her dark glance and her gawky movements betrayed nothing of her potential loveliness.

Bridegroom Heiner ran toward her, beaming—his eyes shone, but his mouth was serious. He offered her his arm with a grand gesture. Slowly they walked up to the altar. Ancient Luxi crept along beside them with hoary, benevolent dignity, and Lieschen came behind, bearing before her the gay-colored festive meal as if it were church-plate.

They stood opposite the priest, and looked up at him with radiant eyes. The latter, mysteriously enveloped in his cape, held out the fragile crucifix over them, and asked with solemn appeal: "Do you really want to marry? You know that the dwarfs will scratch you to pieces if you are unfaithful to each other! You know that the executioners will torture you. Will you remain faithful for ever and ever? A thousand years? A hundred thousand years? Infinite-Pox years?"

Heiner and Renate replied softly with bowed heads: "Yes."

They were so absorbed, so devoutly engrossed in their performance that they did not hear mama's approach. She stood alone in the bushes behind their backs, her eyes still moist from the sorrow of parting. She smiled first at the grave game of the children, at the pastor's grotesquely ceremonious blessing, and at the bridal couple's touching devoutness. But the smile on her face soon gave way to deep seriousness.

It seemed to her that she had never beheld her children thus, had never before seen their faces look like this. She visioned in a second the whole future life of her children with such magnified distinctness that it almost frightened her. Now they were standing here together, promising each other eternal faithfulness. They

vowed never to forsake each other, almost as if they had a premonition that perhaps later one of them might have need of the other.

Now they were still playing proudly with one another. Now they even believed that they could always remain together, always side by side. But outside, life was waiting for them. It would not allow the four to escape it. Indeed, it was perhaps more difficult than ever, and it demanded harshly that they learn to endure it, to get along and come to terms with it. Life would seize them as half-grown children. From the beginning it would spare them nothing: with enormous gayety, danger and sadness, it would descend upon them. At first they might think that this, too, must be sport and play like everything hitherto. But soon the four children would notice that life is serious, in truth,

as serious as death, however playful or romantic it might seem.

But the mother knew that they would hold their own. The mother knew that they would be bold, no matter how much assailed by dangers or involved in difficulties. They would in the end always be serene enough to free themselves.

How would her children be in fifteen short years?—Christiane saw them all before her. Renate, with her head bowed under the weight of heavier hair, still demure and reserved, energetic and self-reliant; with an aloof gayety, independent, alone, but often yielding and conquered.—Her dark eyes and her beautiful mouth, which had become so much softer, attested to all that.

The radiance had disappeared from Heiner's eyes, or was perhaps only concealed by many veils. But his brow had

remained pure. Scanty hair hung over his innocent brow. That was his mother's mouth: she herself recognized it again in this still boyish face, that wonderful mouth which her husband had worshiped with chaste ecstasy. But did it not have in her son an even more dangerous softness? This mouth did not deny itself nor the others anything. It was a woman's mouth under the manly brow, so completely did it yield itself to life. But was it not probable that it would soon be old and corrupt, if it offered itself too ardently to life's kisses? A certain carelessness and abandon in Heiner's bearing had a disquieting effect and gave one a presentiment of bad things. But the mother felt no anxiety on his account.

There stood Fridolin, alone and wise, full of industry and peculiar ambition. At what did he aim? How high did he aim?

He chuckled disquietingly, and rubbed his hands together. He turned his unbeautiful face from his mother as if he had many plans and secrets to conceal. He had an ugly gait, but an appealing strength. The lonely, compact figure tramped up arduous mountain paths, far away from his brother and in a different direction, but now and again beckoning playfully over to him, as if to say: "We know our relationship all right—"

And now Lieschen. The mother smiled because she saw Lieschen. Lieschen had soon become a young wife. Who would have thought it? Was it really known whether she was happy? Did she love her husband?—Or did she suffer at his side?—She had never said much. But she bore her plainer lot cheerfully, while her brothers and sister followed such venturesome paths.—Therefore Christiane would soon

be a grandmother; she already saw Lieschen's healthy children playing in the sand.

She had never before seen her children in this light. How quickly they would now develop. Now every one went to meet his fate, his danger, his hope. Should she be anxious about them? At this moment her mind was too much engrossed with the *necessity* of all that would happen to them, to feel anxiety.

She turned her back to them and walked slowly off through the garden.

Not a leaf stirred in the garden these late summer afternoons. She wanted to sit down on this bench. No place in the world could have been quieter than this bench.

This excessive brightness was hard to endure. Each leaf stood motionless in its own life. No passion came, relieving and

obliterating; here no wind came, bringing disorder and merciful confusion. Life was being enacted before her at this moment with relentless clearness. It asked to be approved, just as it was.

Four children, whom she had borne, were growing up. Four destinies proceeded from her, and would be fulfilled according to life's purpose. A fifth child was growing in her womb.—*That was it.*

There were not two kinds of life, as she had thought, in the rapturous night; the static and the dynamic. There was only life, which grew toward death.

She would never be able to comprehend it. No one had ever comprehended it. She did not come to terms with it. She did not search for its meaning. How her children would still struggle to get along with it, to be victorious, to fathom its mys-

teries! She sat in humility, and felt only that life was being enacted.

Meanwhile, the children had already gone on to the wedding feast. Lieschen, curtseying, presented them with cake-dough and slices of apple. The priest feasted with wry satisfaction. But the bridal couple remained in ardent embrace.

CHAPTER X

WINTER came. The fir trees were already standing black and icy-cold before white meadows. The pond was frozen over, and at the Zwicker peasant's place one could coast on Afra's clumsy sled.

But how was mama? Had not her appearance become stranger from week to week?

The children observed shyly that she was becoming more and more misshapen. She was now so fat that she was already taking short, laborious steps. Was she eating so unnaturally much that she swelled up and changed so? Her face seemed strange, and at the same time blissful. She smiled in a painful, yet remark-

ably happy manner. Who would know about her? Often she remained in her room for days at a time, sitting heavy and inactive at the window, humming melodies, with luminous glance. Her eyes were really more beautiful than ever, and the children nearly always felt for their awkward mother that strong, almost guilty affection which they used to confess only at night in their beds.

Dr. Beermann sometimes appeared. They knew him well, as he had often tapped and listened at their chests when they had colds or were feverish. He had a black, well-brushed mustache, and went energetically up and down stairs. Laughing, he washed his hands, which then had a fresh and manly odor. He bent down to the children so that the vein in his forehead stood out, and his bass voice spoke jocularly. "Yes, yes, mama has a tape

worm," the country doctor teased them roughly. But the children did not believe it.

Fräulein Konstantine treated mama considerately, but she was piqued. She said repeatedly that a lady who cared for her reputation really could not stay in this house. She was often sympathetic, almost sentimental to the children, without their comprehending why. "You poor creatures," she said disdainfully, yet gently—and she did not interfere with their games so often. Afra, the cook, had also become enigmatic. She liked to indulge in curious phrases, and often stood in secret converse with Fräulein Konstantine.

When the children sat together in their play room in the evening, they decided in whispers that something great was happening near them. If they had only known what it was! It seemed uncanny to them,

yet they all had the presentiment that it must be something very beautiful in spite of Fräulein Konstantine's sympathetic gentleness, and the suspicious jests of the cook.

Then mama entered the dim room, and stood heavily in the door-frame, and the four pairs of eyes were directed darkly at her. "What are you talking about?" asked mama with that melancholy and blissful smile, which her face now almost always had. And yet she knew so well what the children were talking about.

One night the hubbub arose. The children, half asleep, heard it. They had really expected it for a long time. What had been quietly brewing so long, simply had to break forth and actually happen sometime. Wasn't there a ringing? Weren't carriages driving up? They even believed they heard screams and laments.

When they came into the dining-room the next morning, a strange, elderly lady in the garb of a trained nurse was sitting there, comfortably drinking coffee. "Ah, there are the little ones," she said gayly, "do you know that you have a new little sister?"

At first the children did not understand what she meant, and they became quite pale. Fridolin believed that the witch had now finally appeared before him. The elderly lady laughed unpleasantly at the fright of the children.

But Dr. Beermann, vigorous and good-humored, was already approaching. "Yes, yes, master stork has already been here," he announced sonorously, even clapping his hands. "He has given mama a good bite in the leg, but in return he has brought a fine little sister."

The children pressed close together, and

Lieschen suddenly began to cry softly. Heiner only said: "Yes, yes, then there are five of us?"—and he forced a smile. But that wasn't what terrified them. Their shock and their incomprehensible anxiety had a deeper reason.

Fräulein Konstantine looked ill-humored and injured. "Yes, yes, the stork has been in the house," she, too, remarked crossly and quickly. "Do come and see what he has brought." While they were all going over to Christiane's room, Dr. Beermann said to Fräulein Konstantine in a low voice, glancing significantly to one side: "It was a dangerous delivery."

The children stood in the bedroom door. Mama was smiling, her face so white in the white bed. Dr. Beermann gave a satisfied laugh. "Don't be afraid to come in, little band!" he coaxed, laughing.

Wide-eyed and distrustful, they ap-

proached, Renate in the lead. Mama stretched her beautiful hand out to them, but she seemed too weak to raise her head. She rested so relaxed and exhausted, as if she would never again have the strength and desire to move or get up.

Beside her bed in the crib lay the creature for whose sake she had suffered so much. The children bent reverently over it to observe in silence its toothless, wailing little mouth, and clenched, tiny, red fists. Heiner was the first to stroke, very cautiously, the tightly-closed little hands. Fridolin was interested and grave, while Lieschen seemed still to be afraid. She drew back gently.

But Renate gazed at her little sister with an entirely new expression. Her face, which she bent over the little crib, had suddenly changed. It had become softer

and more womanly at sight of the new-born child.

“Now just watch out,” Dr. Beermann joked in the background, washing his hands, “now not even a cat will bother about you any more. Now the little one is the favorite——”

But the children did not laugh with him.

Heiner’s eyes suddenly assumed that blue hardness which they had had only once before. Yet the affectionate and bewildered smile, with which he bent lower and lower over his little sister, was not in harmony with this defiance in his eyes.

But Renate looked suddenly at the death-mask of her father, which hung, gleaming white, in front of the black velvet above the bed of the invalid. The father’s face was unchanged. His austere, dreaming brow was as calm as ever, and in his glance not the shadow of reproach,

not the breath of a sorrow could be detected. Renate had never yet known that she loved her father's face so much, so extravagantly.

Her eyes returned to her mother. They encountered for the first time those of her mother. Now their eyes showed mutual understanding for the first time.

Then her mother lowered her head again. She bent over the child, smiling weakly with blissfully closed eyes.

Leaning over the crib, she said very softly, as if she were confiding a secret to the child:

“But this time I almost died.”

THE END



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